

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

---

NEWTON



M 1941







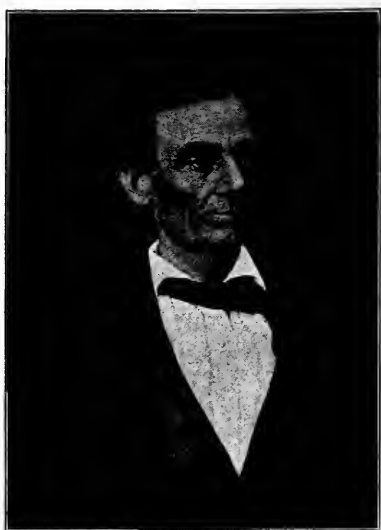
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant







# ABRAHAM LINCOLN

## AN ESSAY

*By* Joseph Fort Newton



Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
Published by The Torch Press  
MDCCCCX

*An address made before the members of The State Historical Society of Iowa and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, Iowa City, Iowa, May 25, 1910, and published in this form by the courtesy of The State Historical Society of Iowa*

COPYRIGHT, 1910, BY

THE TORCH PRESS

TO MY FATHER, WHO FOUGHT ABRAHAM  
LINCOLN, THIS ESSAY IS INSCRIBED BY ONE  
WHO REVERES THE MEMORY OF BOTH

## The Torch Series

Edited by Joseph Fort Newton

*“ We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”*



## ABRAHAM LINCOLN

**I**T IS not easy to speak of Lincoln calmly. He was a man of such high and tender humanity, of personality so appealing and pathos so melting, that almost every study of him ends in a blur of eulogy. No higher tribute could be paid to any man, yet that was just what he did not like and the reason why he refused, in his later years, to read biography. He had no vanity, and being a man of humor he did not pose, nor did he wish any one to draw him other than he was. But men can no more help loving and praising him than they can help loving and praising surpassing goodness anywhere. His very honesty in simplicity makes him all the more winning, and to this day he puzzles any artist for that he was so unlike any model.

Lincoln was a great and simple man,

so simple that many deemed him darkly deep ; and, like all simple men, he had a certain mystery about him ; a mystery too simple to be found out. That is to say, he was a man who seemed complex because, in the midst of many complexities, he was, after all, simple ; an uncommon man with common principles and virtues, who grew up in the back-yard of the republic and ascended to power in a time of crisis. His later fame, so unlike his early life, made men stare, because they had not seen the steps he took along the road. His genius was home-spun, not exotic. It does not dazzle or baffle, does not bewilder or amaze, and is thus an example and a legacy of inspiration. Yet no one who saw him ever saw another like him. He was unique. He stood apart. He was himself — original, genuine, simple, sincere. The more we know about him the greater he seems to be in his totality of powers, none of which was supremely great, but all of which, united and held in poise, made him at once so universal and so unique.



# I

Behind Lincoln, as the background of his life, lay the wide melancholy of the western plain, its low hills, its shifting sky, its shadowy forests and winding streams, and the hardship and hazard of pioneer days. There we see the lad in the log cabin, studying by a dim fire-light; the rail-splitter and the reader of books; the flat-boatman going far down the rivers — a strange, heroic, pathetic story which still awaits the touch of a master hand. Then appears the tall, gawky captain in the Black Hawk War, clad in a suit of blue jeans, sworn into the service by Jefferson Davis; the post-master at New Salem who carried his office in his hat; the surveyor whose outfit was sold for debt; the village sceptic, fabulist and athlete; and the young man standing white and forlorn at the grave of a country girl, whose image he kept in his heart wrapped in the sweet and awful sadness of the valley of shadows.

Those early days return in all their monotony of privation and toil, full of

the patience that could walk down a long road without turning, brightened by dutifulness alone, pointed but not cheered by wayside anecdote, until by struggle and sorrow he became a man. He was inured to hardship and poverty, rarely ill, wiry, stalwart and a man of regular habit; having a certain innate dignity and charm of nature, despite his ungainly figure and ill-fitting garb; and what he was he had made himself. Having a mind too broad and grave for the details of life, he was as indifferent to the arts of society as he was to the beauty of trees and flowers. A master of men and at ease with them, he had no skill with women, and was never so awkward and clumsy as when in their presence. At the grave of Ann Rutledge he vowed, it is said, never to marry; but within a few months he was entangled again, learning from Mary Owens the comedy of love as before he had learned its tragedy. Seldom has there been such a blend of crudities and refinements, of ambitions and renunciations, of haunting beauties and gnarled angularities.

No man ever had fewer illusions about himself and the world, and he did not expect great destiny to come to him as a lottery prize. He knew there must be work, patience, wisdom, disappointment; he was not sanguine of himself, but he rated no eminence or honor too high or too difficult to attain. Never petulant but sometimes moody, he was fond of solitude, and would often sit for hours dead to the world and buried in thought. At other times a cloud would fall over his face, and he was the most hopeless and forlorn of mortals, as though tortured by some hidden sorrow, or brooding over some wrong that never in time or eternity could be set right. When the shadow lifted he was himself again, beguiling the hours with the aptness and ingenuities of his anecdotes — some of them, it is true, more cogent than delicate, though he tolerated smuttiness only when it was disinfected by humor. He was strangely reserved in friendship, rarely surrendering entire confidence, and those who knew him best were younger than himself. All the while he

seemed to know everybody, yet only a few ever felt that they knew him.

So we meet him in 1840, making his way slowly, unhappy, ambitious, and alone. He owned a horse and was fond of riding, but he made a poor income and often went to bed with no notion of how he should meet the claims of the morrow. For nearly one-fifth part of his life he owed money he could not pay, and while of easy disposition, debt galled him and hastened his wrinkles. His marriage, though not without its jars, was in every way advantageous to him. It whetted his industry, did not nurse too much the penchant for home indolence that he had, and taught him, particularly, that there was such a thing as society, which observes a man's boots as well as his principles. He was always a loyal and reverent husband, a gentle but not positive father, and the towering ambition of his wife out-topped his own. Yet, while not lazy, he always loafed a little, studying men more than books, and reading the signs of the times.

## II

Just what position Lincoln held at the bar in his early years is not easy to know. He did not study the law deeply until a later time and was never a learned lawyer, as that phrase is now used. Most of his practice was on the old Eighth Circuit—following the judges from one log court-house to another, always over bad roads and often over swollen streams; a kind of life he enjoyed for its careless, roving freedom, its human comedy, and its rollicking comradeship. This is not to say that he practiced by his wits, though he trusted much to his native gift of speech, and for all his doric simplicity and integrity a shrewder mortal has never lived. He was at his best before juries, where his knowledge of human nature, his keen logic, and his gifts of humor and mimicry came into full play, and where his occasional bursts of appeal swept all before him.

But the law is a jealous mistress, and so far Lincoln was more absorbed in pol-

itics than in law. What led him on was a little engine of ambition that knew no rest, which strove not for riches but for honors; and if the fire burned low, his wife added fuel. He knew how to play the game of politics according to the rules thereof, and was not over-nice as to methods when no moral principle was involved. On one issue, however,—that of slavery—he stood firm from the first, and neither the allurements of office nor the blandishments of good-fellowship could move him; though as a loyal party man he was willing to keep his convictions in abeyance for the sake of party harmony and victory. He was never a professional politician—that is he did not live by holding office, and of the \$200 made up by his friends for the canvass of 1846 he returned \$199.90 unused.

Of his career in Congress little need be said, except that it is valuable chiefly as showing us the politician out of which the statesman was made. It took a long time to make Lincoln; he was still growing when he died. His speeches at this

time, one of them waggish almost to the point of buffoonery, are not edifying, least of all when read alongside his solemn, seer-like words ten years later. Some have thought that they could detect a tone of inner protest in his speeches in Congress; but that is the error, into which so many have fallen, of reading his early years in the light of his later days. No; if we are to understand Lincoln, we must keep in mind his "talent for growth," and watch the slow unfolding of his life. But it is true that his stay at the capital made him more studious, by making him aware of the defects of his early training; while his visit to New England showed him, for the first time, that the nation had in its bosom two antagonistic ideals, both growing every day and struggling to be free. He returned, a subdued man, having seen a cloud upon the horizon portentous of impending storm.

No doubt it was a heavenly destiny, shaping his end, that sent him back to Springfield, and out on the muddy

roads of the old Eighth Circuit. Politically he seemed to himself, indeed, a man without a future, but that was less important than the fact that he was not prepared for the future that awaited him. Even at forty he was singularly immature; he had not yet come to a full mastery of his powers; and the conflicting elements of his nature needed to be melted and fused into a more solid unity. As has often been pointed out, this came at last at the call of a great cause, evoking in him a vein of mysticism, which, with his canny sagacity and his humane pity, more and more swayed him; softening all that was hard within, and hardening all that was soft. Of this we are sure: when he returned to public life in 1854, he was a changed man, moving with a firmer tread, in one way not less frank and friendly, but in another a separate and detached soul—as one whose eye was set on some star visible to himself alone.



### III

Thenceforward Lincoln became every day more serious, more solitary, more studious than ever before. Abjuring politics, he studied law in earnest, and no man ever had greater power of application than he. Also, he began a course of rigid mental discipline with the intent to improve his faculties, especially his powers of logic and of language. Hence his fondness for Euclid, which he carried with him on the circuit until he could with ease demonstrate all the propositions in the six books. In the same way he took up German, but he seems never to have attained to a working mastery of it. Shakespeare and the Bible he read devotedly, parts of them many times, though he did not read either one of them through. This fellowship with great books bore fruit in a finer feeling for words, and the florid rhetoric of his early days became an aversion. His style became simple, forthright, and thrusting, and the style was the man.

His figure was familiar in Springfield as he strode along from his home on Eighth Street to his dingy office in the Square. Rarely has an office been conducted with less order. He carried most of his memoranda in his high hat, together with bits of poetry and other items clipped from newspapers, of which he was an assiduous reader. Ten years later a law-student, in cleaning up the office, found quantities of Congressional garden seed mixed with Whig speeches and Abolitionist pamphlets, and some of the seed had sprouted in the accumulated dirt. Often he needed money, but he could not be induced to sue for his fees which were so small that his partner, and even Judge Davis, expostulated with him. But he worked hard, and rapidly developed into one of the best trial lawyers in the State.

As a lawyer Lincoln was an advocate rather than a jurist — though he sometimes sat as judge *pro tem* for his friend David Davis — a “case lawyer,” in the phrase of the craft. Averse to office drudgery and impatient of tech-

nicalities, he was singularly lucid in stating a case, courteous but searching in examining witnesses, forceful and sagacious in argument, having a remarkable memory for evidence, and when the case turned upon human or moral issues a persuasive advocate. His presence was commanding, his denunciation terrific, and the spell of his marvelous personality gave him an almost occult power over juries. Sometimes, though not often, his humor won the verdict; but he was not always mild, not always funny, and when he was angry it was a terrible spectacle. Though his name appears in the Illinois Reports in one hundred and seventy-three cases, his income was never more than two or three thousand dollars a year.

Life on the old Eighth Circuit was a gay one, and Lincoln loved it. Books dealing with this period show us pictures of dramatic court scenes, of famous murder trials, of parleying lawyers and lying witnesses, of country taverns where judge and jury, lawyers and litigants sat at table together; of a long,

gaunt figure stretched on beds too short for him, studying by a dim light; of story-telling jousts continuing, amidst roars of laughter, far into the night. Too often he has been portrayed, at this time, as a mere fabulist, which was as far as possible from the truth, though it is true that his humor was brightest when his heart was most forlorn. This may account for the memories of these years of poverty, obscurity, and baffled ambition; humor being his door of escape from pressing thoughts within.

But fundamentally Lincoln was serious, even sad, and while men spoke of him as "Old Abe" behind his back, in his presence they indulged in no uncouth familiarities. His humor—and it was humor rather than wit, for he was essentially a poet and a man of pathos—lay close to that profound and inscrutable melancholy which clung to him and tinged all his days; the shadow, perhaps, of some pre-natal gloom woven in the soul of his mother, and deepened, no doubt, by a temperament which felt the tragedy in mortal things. It was

not for his humor that men loved him, nor yet for his intellect, with its blend of integrity and shrewdness, which all admired, but for his manliness, his simplicity, his sympathy, and for much else which we feel even now and cannot describe. To this day, men who were close to Lincoln have a memory as of something too deep for speech. They recount his doings, they recall his words, they tell his stories, but they always leave something untold: only a light comes into their eyes, and one realizes what a well-founded reverence is.

Of his inner life during those buried years — from 1848 to 1854 — only a few glimpses remain, but they show that it was a time of revolution and crisis. Mentally he was occupied as never before with those questions which every man, soon or late, must settle for himself; that Lincoln met and made terms with them is certain, but by what process we know not. So also the great national question, which lay upon him like the weight of a personal care. His eulogy of Henry Clay, while not a great speech,

revealed that he was convinced that the slavery question could no longer be compromised, and what a fearful looking for, of judgment to come, was foreshadowed in his closing words. Before his public call came he had passed the whole problem through his silent thought, studying it from both sides, and from end to end — a fact which should be kept in mind by those who imagine that his speeches were made as if by magic. But to the end of his life, amidst the whirl of politics and the storm of war, his circuit-riding days were invested for him with a grave and joyous memory.

#### IV

Whatever may have been the motives of Stephen A. Douglas in repealing the Missouri Compromise — and they are as muddy today as they were in 1854 — he precipitated a revolution, and became the *avant courier* of Civil War. Lincoln, now in the prime of his powers, was on his feet to refute the new dogma and to challenge the man who had wrought such

mischievous; and there followed a debate, continuing at intervals from 1854 to 1858, memorable in the annals of the nation. If, as the story runs, it was a sleepy old game of whist that led to the repeal of that Compact, the conflict did not again cease until slavery was destroyed in the fire kindled by its friends.

Only a few men, said Edmund Burke, really see what passes before their eyes, and Lincoln was one of them. By nature a watcher of the signs of the times, he did not read them amiss, but he was slow to admit, even to himself, the bitter truth as he saw it. Hating slavery, he yet recognized its constitutional existence and legal rights, and saw no way of dealing with it except to push it back into a corner and let it die. What he feared more than all else was a clash between the radicals of the North and the hot-spurs of the South, and a rush to arms. He brooded over the abyss gloomily, and his keen logic, touched with passionate earnestness, gave his speech a luminous solidity rare in the history of eloquence.

Even his jealousy of Douglas served the better to point his logic with tips of fire.

Wary, discreet, and politic, he did not come forward to speak and act until he was fully satisfied that the time was ripe, and no one was ever a better judge of the temper of the hour. Often his feelings — intense and almost volcanic at times — pressed hard for hot words and radical measures, but he bit his lips, to use his own phrase, and kept quiet — jotting down his thoughts on scraps of paper and stowing them away in his high hat. Some of those fugitive pieces have been preserved, and they show with what keen and searching logic he had gone to the bottom of his subject. So that when he uttered his word the whole man was in it, and his oratory was logic on fire, all the more effective for its evident restraint of passion not less than for its austere lucidity of style.

When he replied to Douglas during the State Fair in October, 1854, he was an obscure man, known as a shrewd lawyer, a story-teller, and a Whig of anti-slav-



ery leanings. But when he had finished, men of all parties knew that a new leader had come, the equal of Douglas in debate — a man of genius ablaze with passion. For four hours the circuit-riding attorney unfolded and described the great issue with a mastery of facts, a logical strategy, and a penetration of insight that astonished even his friends. Never did the pet dogma of Douglas receive a more thorough ventilation, while the Senator himself sat on a front bench, not twelve feet away, intently listening. There were warm passages between them as the afternoon ran along, but Lincoln kept his temper, even under the most provoking taunts, and his readiness of retort delighted the vast throng. One who heard that speech has left this memory :

It was a warmish day, and Lincoln was in his shirt sleeves. Although awkward, he was not in the least embarrassed. He began in a slow and hesitating manner, but it was evident that he had mastered his subject, and

that he knew he was right. He had a high-pitched, falsetto voice that could be heard a long distance in spite of the bustle of the crowd. He had the accent and pronunciation peculiar to his native State, Kentucky. His gestures were made with his body and his head rather than with his hands, and were the natural expression of the man. Gradually he warmed up with his subject, his angularity disappeared, and he passed into that attitude of unconscious majesty so conspicuous in Saint-Gaudens's statue at the entrance of Lincoln Park in Chicago. His listeners felt that he believed every word he said, and that, like Luther, he would go to the stake rather than abate one jot or tittle of it. In such moments he was the type of the ancient Hebrew prophet.

Twelve days later the rivals met in debate at Peoria, where Lincoln repeated his Springfield effort, but in an improved form both as to compactness of argument and forcefulness of style. Fortunately he wrote out the speech — from memory,

for he did not use notes — and it remains to this day one of the imperishable utterances of the slavery debates, if not of our entire history. Some think it superior to Webster's reply to Hayne, because its theme is loftier and its scope wider. Others hold it to be the superior of the two as an example of English style, making up in its simplicity, directness and lucidity what it lacks of the massive movement and rhythmic flow of the Websterian diction. In after years Lincoln regarded the Peoria address as perhaps the ablest speech he had ever made, and while it contained few of those phrases which in his later speeches became popular slogans, its austerity of restraint gave it an added impressiveness and force.

What arrests one in all his speeches was the spirit of sympathy and justice shown towards the people of the South, against whom he had no unkindly feeling. They were his kinsmen, and he knew their situation, many of whom hated slavery but knew not how to rid themselves of it. He was aware that interest

and long usage had blinded their judgment, just as like interest and usage would have blinded the moral sense of the people of the North. He did not hold the South solely responsible for slavery, though he felt that they should long ago have devised some system of gradual emancipation. Unlike the Abolition orators, he did not dwell on the cruelty of slavery, but he left no doubt as to his feeling that it was grossly wrong, unjust, and unwise. While he did not plead for abolition, he had none of the spirit of concession to mere property interest that ruined Webster, and spoke always as one to whom the moral issue was vividly alive. Until the Dred Scott decision swept away all hope, he continued to urge the restoration of the Spirit of Compromise, without which he saw one side aggressive, the other retaliating — and in the end War.

Yet, for all his calm restraint and wise conservatism, Lincoln was a man of fiery nature, and there were occasional gleams of a slumbering lightning which

he hardly dared to use. Once at least, at Bloomington in 1856, his impenetrable reserve gave way, his pent-up brooding passion rushed forth into flaming speech, and his words swayed and quivered as if charged with electricity. But it was not so much slavery as the threat of disunion that stirred him, disclosing at once the issue and the leader, and his thrilling appeal fused the discordant elements of his audience into a solid and victorious party. Every hair of his head stood on end, fire seemed to flash from his little grey eyes, and the whole man was ablaze when he said, with a tragic earnestness that almost lifted men from their seats: “We will say to the Southern disunionists, *we won’t go out of the Union and you shan’t!*” Of that speech Herndon wrote in a lecture, twelve years later:

The Bloomington speech was the one grand effort of his life. The smothered fire broke out; his eyes were aglow; he felt justice; he stood before the throne of the eternal Right. It was logic; it was pathos; it was en-

thusiasm ; it was justice, equity, truth and right set ablaze by the divine fires of a soul maddened by the wrong ; it was hard, heavy, knotty, gnarly, backed with wrath. If Mr. Lincoln was six feet four inches high usually, at Bloomington that day he was seven feet, and inspired at that.

Most men receive from their audience in vapor what they return in flood, but it was not after that manner that Lincoln was eloquent. With a great crowd before him his thought seemed to be moving in remote and lonely regions, as one who saw things in the large and from afar. His appeal was not so much to his audience as to the individual man of whom it was composed, and to what was highest in every one of them. He believed that the human soul, when separated from the tumults which commonly disturb it, cannot refuse to respond to the voice of righteousness and reason, and his faith acted like a spell upon those who heard him. Each man seemed to stand apart from the throng, and in those great hours when the speaker

stood as one transfigured and inspired men felt that their own souls spoke to them in the tones of the orator. He rarely, if ever, raised his hand above his head in gesture, and he had almost none of the hypnotic magnetism which legend attributes to him. His very voice, so keen and thin, with little feeling of harmony in it, and little variety of cadence; his enunciation, so careful, so deliberate, and at times so hesitating; his restrained manner, in which there was nothing of the daring reckless freedom of the popular agitator — all these added to the impression that he was a man of authentic tidings. Such eloquence is possible only in times of great crises, and Lincoln spoke with the ultimate grace of simplicity at an hour when the right word fell with the authority of an apparition.

## V

After all, history is only past politics, and those who imagine that Lincoln waited for honors to be thrust upon him do

not know the man whom Herndon, his partner, knew. Had he been such a guileless Parsifal in politics he could never have dominated his party in Illinois, dictated its platforms, and guided it into a moderate and wise course. Still less could he have met the astute, artful, masterful Douglas, whose resourcefulness was only surpassed by his unctuous and persuasive sophistry. An example of his far-reaching sagacity, too often overlooked, may be seen in the crisis of 1858.

With the revolt of Douglas against the Buchanan regime came a quick turn of events which baffled the most astute, and deceived some of the very elect. Rumors were adrift to the effect that "the Little Giant," having defied the Slave Party, might follow the logic of his position. On one issue at least he was already standing with the Republicans, and there were those who hailed his coming over to the party with great joy. Though a sinner somewhat late in returning, they conceived that he might still further repent of his sin against the peace and good



faith of the nation. Outside of Illinois, the party seemed almost willing to let by-gones be by-gones and to accept Douglas into the ranks as a leader. Stranger things had happened, and the suggestion gathered momentum and plausibility as it spread.

One after another men like Seward, Wilson, Colfax, and Greeley, were won to this view, some going so far as to intimate, as a practical expedient, that the party demand might be softened in order to admit so able a convert. At last Greeley — honest, well-meaning, but ill-advised — actually urged the Republicans of Illinois not to put up a candidate against Douglas in the coming contest for the Senate. No one now believes that Douglas ever had any intention of going over to the Republican party; but in the new turn of affairs he did see, as he thought, a chance of attaching that party, or a part of it, to the tail of his kite. Having breached the Democracy, if he could divide the Republican party he might be able to harness one of its steeds

with his Democratic donkey and ride first into the Senate, and then into the White House. It was a daring scheme, but not at all impossible, and it would have succeeded had not it been for the courage, fidelity, and sagacity of Lincoln and a little coterie of friends.

One has only to read the letters of Lincoln to learn that he had the ambitions of a man; but it must also be said that in this crisis, though his own political future was involved, personal motives were secondary. Indeed, he had more than once shown his willingness to stand aside for other men who were true to the right star — for Trumbull in 1854, to go no farther back. But he could not sit still and see the party which had fought the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, had survived the defeat of 1856, and had risen to new life under the staggering blow of the Dred Scott decision, fall into the hands of a man whom he regarded as a trimmer, a trickster, and a political gambler. So that when the wily Senator returned in triumph to Chicago, feeling that his fight

in behalf of Kansas had won the day, he found, to his amazement, that Lincoln had dictated an issue which threw him upon the defensive.

Today the words of Lincoln at Springfield on June 16, 1858, march before us with the solemn foot-fall of destiny. Even to the men who heard them, on that summer day, they seemed heavy with awful prophecies. If radicalism means rootedness, in that utterance he placed his party on a basis so radical that Douglas dared not follow. He not only rescued his party from an unholy alliance; he saved it from apostacy and ruin. Against the advice of all his friends, except Herndon, he said:

A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where

the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Small wonder that the whole nation watched the debate which followed, where Shiloh was fought at Ottawa and Gettysburg at Freeport. When Lincoln found himself competing for the Senatorship with the quickest and most popular debater in the nation, he saw nothing odd or dramatic about it; not that he had self-conceit, but that he was aware of his powers and thought the opportunity possible; having prepared his speeches while watching the flies on the ceiling of his dingy back office. Douglas, with his powerful voice and facile energy, went into the campaign at full speed. Lincoln began cautiously, but when they came out of it Douglas was worn down with rage and hoarseness, while Lincoln was fresher than ever. His opponent was often arrogant and testy in his pres-

ence, but he, rarely flurried and seldom angry, so grew that when, though defeated for the Senate, he entered the White House at last, Douglas was less astonished than any one else — and held his hat while he took the oath of office.

In political philosophy Lincoln was a Henry Clay Whig with strong anti-slavery sentiments, never an Abolitionist, never an advocate of “the higher law.” Like all great reformers, at least in the earlier stage of their career, his ideals were more frequently in the past than in the future, and he began, not without hesitation, a pruning of gross abuses, a reverting to the healthy simplicity of by-gone times. Like Shibli Bagarag in “The Shaving of Shagpat,” — published by George Meredith the same year — he began by proposing a friendly and conservative shave for the Slave Despot. True to the nature of tyranny, the Slave Power waxed exceeding angry, until its face was like a berry in a bush; but when Shagpat had to be shaved thoroughly, our Shibli was equal to the task.

Amidst threatening chaos he ascended from a country law office to the high place of power as if it were a matter of course, giving to Herndon — his friend, his partner, and his indefatigable fellow-worker in a great human cause — permission to use the firm name, as before, without a conscious trait of poetry; yet looking to the far future with a longing that was poetry. Though one was taken and the other left, and a great war rolled between them, the old shingle still hung in the bare stairway until death dissolved the partnership. One who wrote to Herndon asking if his partner was strong enough and firm enough to undertake his task, received this reply:

I know Lincoln better than he knows himself. I know this seems a little strong, but I risk the assertion. Lincoln is a man of heart — aye, as gentle as a woman's and as tender — but he has a will as strong as iron. He therefore loves all mankind, hates slavery and every form of despotism. Put these together and you can form your own conclusion. Lincoln will

fail here, namely, if a question of political economy — if any question comes up which is doubtful, questionable, which no man can demonstrate, then his friends can rule him; but when on Justice, Right, Liberty, the Government, the Constitution, and the Union, then you may all stand aside: he will rule then, and no man can move him — no set of men can do it. There is no fail here. This is Lincoln, and you mark my prediction. *You and I must keep the people right; God will keep Lincoln right.*

## VI

Of leaders of men there are two kinds. One sees the thing as it ought to be and is to be, and condemns all else that falls below the ideal. They are reformers, agitators, and sometimes iconoclasts — dreamers who know not the slow ways whereby dreams are wrought into reality. They are noble in their fealty to high ideals; by their burning zeal they make us feel and think; but by a sure instinct we refuse to entrust the reins of

power into their hands. Amidst the tangle of legal rights and practical necessities, of conflicting interests and constitutional provisions, they are helpless. That they see no difficulties is their virtue; that others see all the difficulties is perhaps a greater virtue; and it would be trite to say that the nation needed, and needs, both virtues. As a fact, in the case of the abolition of slavery the radical and violent solution of the idealists had at last to be adopted.

The other kind of leader sees the ideal no less clearly, nor is he less loyal to it. But he also sees things as they are, sees them steadily and sees them whole, and tries patiently and wisely to work out the best results with the forces with which he has to deal. He knows that men are slow of heart and stumbling of step, and he does not run so far ahead of them that they lose sight of him and stop; he knows how to get along with ordinary humanity. Such a leader was Lincoln — uniting an unwavering fidelity to a moral ideal with the practical acumen to make his dream come true —



handicapped by all the things that go to make up wisdom, yet resolute in his patience, his courage, his self-control, and in his mastery of his life consistently with a high moral purpose. Here lies the secret of his statesmanship. No leader in this land ever stood so close to the common people; no one has been at once so frank and so subtle. He knew the people, he was one of them, and they knew and loved and followed him — paying to him, and to their country, the “last full measure of devotion.”

Like all great leaders, Lincoln was by nature conservative, too reverent to be cheerfully iconoclastic, and when forced to act by the educative and compulsive power of events, he obeyed the majestic genius of Law. He was not willing to wreck the Union in order to abolish slavery. Intense as were his feelings against that awful evil — for which North and South were involved in a common historic guilt — he refused to sink the ship in order to cleanse it. He knew that slavery was fixed in the law of the land, confessed in the Con-

stitution, and sanctioned by the courts, and his oath of office was a vow to uphold the law. But he also knew that slavery was fundamentally wrong — both to master and man — and that it would have to go at last, because the increasing kindness and justice of the world were against it. His supreme aim, as he wrote to Greeley, was not to save or destroy slavery, but *to save the Union* — without slavery if he could, with slavery if he must — and from that purpose he could not be turned aside. He was never an Abolitionist. He repudiated the dogma of confiscation. He held, consistently, that if the nation was to free the slaves it should buy them and set them free; and this he had it in mind to do — but war came, and blood, and fire, and

“ A measureless ocean of human tears.”

From the fall of Arthur Ladd, its first victim, to its closing scene, that was the saddest and the noblest war that ever raged — a Nemesis of national sin

and the beginning of a new era. Had there been such a feeling of national unity as now exists, slavery could have been checked and ultimately abolished. But such a feeling did not exist; a fatal dualism had been growing from the first, and finally rent the nation in a conflict the prophecy of which was written in the whole history of the colonies, if not in the annals of England for centuries back. So that Lincoln—in whom, as Stephens noted, the sentiment of Union “rose to the sublimity of a religious mysticism”—instead of saving the Union, may almost be said to have presided at its birth, and witnessed its christening with blood and tears. His personality was providential, and the republic of today, united and free, is at once his dream and his memorial.

## VII

Through it all Lincoln kept his patience, his gentleness, his faith, and his clear, cool reason, though harassed by office-seekers, lampooned by critics, and

reviled by radicals. In time of tumult he was serene, even humorous; in a tempest of hatred he was the still center of kindness; and his face wore amidst the clouds of war the grief of a nation torn and bleeding of heart. He demeaned himself so nobly in that critical and testing ordeal, he had such resources of sagacity, such refinements of sympathy, such wonderful secrets of endurance, that no one could fail to be moved and humbled, if nothing more, by intercourse with him. There he stood, the central figure of the conflict, gentle, strong and wise, firm as granite if need required, yet strangely piteous and sad, bearing insult without revenge, doing his duty as God gave him to see the right, and to this day his very name casts over men a solemn and haunting spell.

As Douglas said, he was "one of those peculiar men who perform with admirable skill everything which they undertake." Simple in manner, plain in speech, his quaint humor and homely ways gave him a familiarity of relation with the people which few men enjoy,

and he ruled the nation as if he were practicing law. Disasters gathered thick upon the fields of battle, and the tide of public feeling seemed at times to turn against him, but he kept his wits and never lost heart. Beneath a mask of careless humor and guileless simplicity he concealed the wiles of strategy, and was often most anxiously reticent when apparently the most indifferent and jocular. "His 'cunning' fairly enters the borders of inspiration," said Evarts, in a sentence unusually terse for Evarts. It might better have been called a trinity of shrewdness, tact, and lightning-quickness of expedient, whereby he divined the trends of public sentiment and piloted the storm of war. Amid the wild passions of the hour, and a babel of discordant voices, he held aloft the ideals of peace through Union, of liberty under the law, of mercy in victory. He had no vanity, no bitterness, no pettiness, and his ingenuity of self-effacement was as remarkable as his unwillingness to evade duty or escape censure. With his order to Meade to follow up the victory he sent

a note which revealed, like a ray of light, what manner of man sat in the White House :

*This order is not of record. If you are successful you may destroy it, together with this note; if you fail, publish the order, and I will take the responsibility.*

No one claims that Lincoln was a master of political science and history; but within the range of his knowledge and vision, which did not extend far beyond the Constitution and laws of his native land, he was a statesman. If he suffered himself, as he frankly confessed, to be guided by events, it was not because he had lost sight of principles, still less because he was drifting, but because he recognized in the events the movement of moral forces, which he was bound to heed, and the foot-steps of God, which he was bound to follow. He sanctioned, though he did not originate, the military arrests, in the sincere belief that the power was given by the Constitution; and his justification of their use was scrupulously de-

void of sophistry. That he made mistakes in his choice of men, particularly of military men, is not denied. Yet nothing could direct him or any one else to the right man except the criterion of experience, fearfully costly as it was. Few of all those who called him a tyrant, ever charged him with personal cruelty, for he had set his heart on saving life whenever there was the slightest excuse; taking time, amidst harassing cares, to mitigate the horrors of war, and even to write to those who had lost their loved ones on the field of battle:

Dear Madam: I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that

our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

History has made record of those awful years when the bravest of men, arrayed in long lines of blue and grey, were cut down like grass. Events marched rapidly; the slaves were freed, the armies of the South melted away, and the hand that guided the war was held out in brotherly forgiveness. The men of the future, looking back from afar, unbiased and clear-eyed, will say that the noblest feat of the genius of Lincoln was the policy he outlined for dealing with the South after the war. There was no rancor in it, no gleam of selfish pride in power, but a magnanimity in triumph that led Tolstoi to say of him that he was "*a Christ in miniature.*" His words had in them, toward the end, a tenderly solemn, seer-like quality, a strain as of blended prophecy and pity. There was on him, then, something of



that touch of gentleness in sadness, as if presaging doom; and this it was that men felt when they caught his eye, which so many said they could never forget. His death filled the nation with awe akin to that evoked by the great tragedies — something of inevitability, much of mystery, as impossible to account for as it is to measure the heavens or to interpret the voices of the winds.

## VIII

It has been said — by Thomas Carlyle — that the religion of a man is the chief fact with regard to him. If we seek for this primary thing in Lincoln, it is found not in his use of Bible imagery — though parts of the Bible were written in his memory — nor yet in his words of goodwill to the men of this or that sect, but in the fiber of his soul, the qualities of his mind, and most of all in the open book of his life. His faith was so much a part of his being that one must analyze him in order to find it; his mind was so moral, and his morality so

intelligent, that they cannot be set the one over against the other. In his elemental qualities of courage, honor and loyalty to truth and the ideal, his melting pity and delicate justice, the faith on which he acted is unveiled as it could not be revealed in any list of dogmas. For surely, as far as mortal may, he exemplified the spirit of Jesus in his life, and it is there that we must look for the real religion of the man.

Lincoln had a profound and penetrating intellect, but it was practical not speculative. Of the skyey genius of Plato and Emerson he had none. Emerson he did not understand, but he loved Channing and Theodore Parker. Such a mind is never radical, nor does it outrun the facts to see what the end of things will be. It deals with realities, not theories, suspects its own enthusiasms, and is content to take one step at a time. He knew not "the great escapings of ecstatic souls," and it is a pity, for the memory of such hours would have brightened his journey with oases of lucid joy. Whereas he lived in a dun-

colored world, sensitive to its plaintive minor note, under a sky as grey as a tired face. So far as is known he formulated no system, though he was quite emphatic in his denial of certain doctrines of the creeds as they were taught — the atonement, for example, the miracles, and the dogma of eternal hell. But all who stood near him felt that in a mystic and poetic way he was a man of faith, even if the cast of his mind made many things dim which to others seemed clear.

Years of meditation and sorrow had brought him a faith of his own — a kind of sublime fatalism in which truth and right will win as surely as suns rise and set. This assurance fed his soul and was the hidden spring of his strength, his valor, and his unbending firmness, the secret at once of his character and of his prophetic insight. Holding to the moral order of the world, he knew that truth will prevail whatever may be the posture of the hour. In his moods of melancholy, which were many and bitter, he threw himself upon this confidence, not

so much in formal prayer — though that was his last resort — as in a deep inner assurance in which he found peace, and power. Some one asked his wife about his religion and she replied, “ It is a kind of poetry.” Her insight was delicate and true; his faith was none other than a simple, home-spun morality touched with poetry.

For, with all his solid common sense, his fine poise of reason, and his wise humor, at bottom Lincoln was a mystic — that is, one who felt that the unseen has secrets which are known only by minds fine enough to hear them. The truth is that, in common with all the great leaders of men, he had much of this fineness of soul in himself — a window opening out into the Unseen, whence great men derive their strength and charm. This it was that gave to his words a quality of their own, and they seem to this day full of ever new prophetic meanings. No man of state in this land ever made so deep a religious impression and appeal as Lincoln did in his last days.

Poetry had made friends with logic, and the very soul of the man shone in his words and work of mercy, in the dignity and pathos of his life, in his solicitude to heal the wounds of a war he had sought to avert. Such a character inspires a kind of awe. Men bow to it, and are touched with a mingled feeling of wonder and regret.

## IX

Of all the great rulers of men, Lincoln is to this day at once the most dearly human and the most sincerely revered. He was a man of artless and unstudied simplicity; a lawyer with the heart of a humanitarian; a man of action led by a seer-like vision; a humorist whose heart was full of tears; as unwavering in justice as he was unfailing in mercy. Such a man the times demanded, and such in the providence of God was given to his country and his race.

On the virgin soil of the West he grew, as a tree grows — only, his roots ran both ways, down into the dark earth

and up into the Unseen — a man, as Grady said, in whose ample nature the virtues of Puritan and Cavalier were blended, and in the depths of whose great soul the faults of both were lost — “not a law-breaker, but a law-maker; a fighter, but for peace; a calm, grave, strong man; formidable, sad; facing down injustice, dishonesty, and crime; and dying ‘in his boots’ in defense of an ideal — of all world-types distinctive to us, peculiar, particular, and unique.” Simple as Æsop, yet subtle as an oriental; meditative as Marcus Aurelius, yet blithe as Mark Twain; as much of a democrat as Walt Whitman, yet devoid of that vague, dreamy egotism, he stood in the White House a high priest of humanity in this land, where are being wrought out the highest ideals of the race. All now know that the Union was the one mastering idea of his life, and that whoever else might let go of faith, or sink into self-seeking, or play fast and loose with truth, that would Lincoln never. He was a prophet of the political religion of his country — tall

of soul, gentle, just, and wise, and of his fame there will be no end.

Our nation makes a wise profession of ideals when it pays tribute to Abraham Lincoln, for that within him which we honor is the saving grace of the republic. On the distant slopes of fame we begin to see that homely, humorous, sad, strong, tender man as he was, and as few saw him while he lived. No one need fear that his real image will be lost in a haze of reverent and grateful memory, for he becomes more real and more unforgettable every year. There is no Lincoln myth. Fable falls away from his simple human majesty as we stand before his later portraits, looking into that great face, with its blend of light and shadow, its calm, level gaze, so frank, so benign, and withal so firm and far-seeing. Nothing that unfolding Time discloses diminishes his noble, heroic, pathetic stature, and the nation grows, when it grows at all, up to, but never away from him.

Still, and always, when we look back at Lincoln and see him amidst the vicis-

situdes of his life, it is the man that we honor — a plain, honest, kindly man, sound of heart, full equally of pity and humor, who knew that humanity is deeply wounded and who tried to heal it; caring much more to deserve praise than to possess it; not free from fault and therefore rich in charity,— a fellow to the finest, rarest, truest souls now or ever to be “ citizens of eternity.”



## In the same Series

*Edited by J. F. Newton*

Old London Town and Other Travel Sketches

By Henry Watterson

A Golden Book and The Literature of Childhood

By William Marion Reedy

Henry Thoreau and Other Children of the Open  
Air

By Theodore Watts-Dunton

Nature Study in Isaiah

By Frederick John Lazell

(others to follow)

## The Torch Series

Gems of the purest literature of our day, carefully  
chosen, edited and printed; each 60 cents net

(Postage .06)













As I<sup>st</sup> -  
indicated in the  
above the good  
household -







